

Opening New Business a 'Smooth Mooove' With Help from SBA Resource Partners



Adrienne Simpson's moving company "strictly for seniors."

Sometimes circumstances can help make a new career almost fall into a person's lap. In the case of Adrienne Simpson, it all started when she had to move her mother back to Michigan after living in Atlanta near her for several years.

"There was no one to help me and Mom showed me that moving seniors is different and that the process is very fragmented," says Simpson. "After I completed her move, I decided to put my years of organizational experience to work with my own moving company strictly for seniors."

Simpson started her company, "Smooth Mooove" Senior Relocation Services, in October of 2002 and landed her first elderly client the next January. Using her own money to start her business, Simpson moved her first customer totally by herself.

Simpson moved to Georgia in 1994 after spending 20 years with Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Michigan where she was director of major groups with responsibility for sales, service and retention of employer groups with 2,500 or more employees. After relocating to Atlanta, she joined CIGNA Healthcare of Georgia in sales and was later director of operations before getting caught up in a corporate downsizing.

Although she had years of experience in corporate operations, Simpson admits she had no experience in what it took to start her new business in Atlanta. "That is why I decided to get help from the Women's Economic Development Agency (WEDA)," explained Simpson. WEDA is one of the nation's Women Business Centers that receives funding from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Soon after she started "Smooth Moooves," Simpson found WEDA and attended its 14-week course "Business Basics" for

small business start ups. "I graduated with the additional knowledge needed to really get my business going," she says.

Simpson added that she has taken additional workshops at WEDA, including classes on obtaining a business loan, bookkeeping for a small business, franchising information and patent-trademarks.

Simpson also received assistance from SCORE, the Service Corps of Retired Executives at its offices in the SBA's downtown Atlanta headquarters. Besides taking several SCORE workshops, several of its members helped by reviewing her business plan before it was submitted to the American Express "Make Mine a Million \$ Business" contest for women entrepreneurs.

Simpson found out about the American Express contest through an email from WEDA. She credits the contest with making her complete a long-term business plan. She submitted her plan, along with financials and company projections to a regional conference held in Atlanta by American Express and a cosponsor "Count-Me-In," a national micro loan agency for women small business owners.

After being selected one of six semifinalists, Simpson did a 4-minute speech about her company before judges in October 2005 that resulted in a grand prize of a new laptop computer, a year of free business coaching and last but not least — a loan of \$45,000. She has already received the computer and the coaching has started. She will get her loan early next year after she submits a 90-day plan on how the money will be spent to develop her business.

Looking ahead, Simpson attributes the success of her three-year old business to WEDA, SBA and SCORE. She now has four full-time and four part-time employees along with two moving trucks. These trucks flash her dancing cow company logo across the city as they move senior citizens to new homes or retirement communities.

Why is it different when a senior relocates? "When seniors move, they usually downsize, they don't take everything," says Simpson. "They need to decide what to keep, what to donate or what to sell or give away."

Offering a turn-key moving service, Simpson's firm offers other services in addition to moving household goods to a new site. Helping to reduce the stress from a move, her firm can deliver heirlooms to family members, make charity donations, handle estate sales or antique appraisals as well as shop for new items a senior may want for their new home.

A native of Detroit, Simpson attended public schools in her home city and later took courses at the University of Michigan, Wayne State University and the Detroit College of Law. She has a daughter Kendall, 18, who helps out at her business when she is not attending the DeKalb School of the Arts.